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JK Rowling



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"I hope it's not too long--it's two rolls of parchment more than Professor Binns asked for."
-- Hermione Granger (PA1)

Some of the most popular features of the Lexicon are the essays. They come in all genres, from comedy to literary analysis. They are not really canon, and there was a time when I seriously doubted that it would be a good idea to include them. That was back in the days right after book four came out and we were desperately trying to assimilate a lot of new information into our understanding of the Wizarding World. Then three things happened to make up my mind. First, Alan Jacobs wrote a marvelous essay about the magic in the Harry Potter books. It was published in 2000 in First Things magazine. A few months later, I received his permission to republish it in the Lexicon. Second, I was involved in a lively discussion on Harry Potter for Grown Ups about how many students there were at Hogwarts, (a discussion which is still going on, off and on, even today). Out of that discussion came an essay by me which pulled together all the facts I could find on the subject. Third, Neil Ward wrote an intriguing post on Harry Potter for Grown Ups about the size of Hogwarts Castle. This short essay was speculation, certainly, but it seemed to fit the facts as they were given in the books and it was a wonderfully imaginative look at Rowling's world. So I begged Neil for permission to reprint his essay in the Lexicon. He agreed. These three essays became the first of many to appear in the Lexicon over the years.

Which essay has been the most popular? Morag Traynor's essay about socks has probably generated the most email and has been linked to the most often. Which has gotten the most people upset? I would have to say that Penny's shipping essay certainly kicked up a small storm, but hers isn't the only one to do so. Some people didn't care much for the essay about Ginny, especially since book five came out and we all learned so much more about her. And I've probably gotten more arguments about my essays about the timeline than any other essays anywhere on the Lexicon, as you can tell by the fact that I wrote

several essays defending the position of the Lexicon.

Each essay is speculation, of course. Each one is someone's opinion, someone's guess, someone's attempt to put together the details from all the books and answer the questions we have. And all of them are great fun to read. Many of you have asked (some repeatedly) that I create an index of the essays so that you can read them more easily. I suspect that some of you just want to make sure you haven't missed one, tucked away in some dark corner of the Lexicon. So I spent a few hours going through all my files and indexing all the essays. I think I found them all, but there might still be one that escaped my search. I'll update this list if I find any like that.

At any rate, have fun reading.

Steve Vander Ark

The Lexicon Essays

in chronological order (as best we can determine the dates)

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schedule of classes by year

First Year:
classes:

- [Astronomy](#)
- [Charms](#)
- [Defense Against the Dark Arts](#)
- [Herbology](#)
- [History of Magic](#)
- [Potions](#)
- [Transfiguration](#)



June: finals (exams)

Second Year

Same classes as first year. During the Easter holidays, students choose two or more additional classes for year 3.

partial list:

- Ancient Runes
- Arithmancy
- Care of Magical Creatures
- Divination
- Muggle Studies

June: finals (exams)

Third Year

Same classes as second year, add two new subjects. Students may drop an elective class if they wish but they are required to continue with the core classes begun in first year.

June: finals (exams)

Fourth Year

Same classes as third year, begin preparing for O.W.L.s. Students may drop an elective class if they wish but they are required to continue with the core classes begun in first year.

June: finals (exams)

Fifth Year

Same classes as fourth year. Students may drop an elective class if they wish but they are required to continue with the core classes begun in first year.

June: Ordinary Wizarding Levels (O.W.L.s)

Sixth Year:

Students don't know what their classes for sixth year will be until after they receive the results of their O.W.L.s. Once they have their O.W.L. results, the students know whether they have achieved the required grades to get into the classes they're interested in for sixth year. On the first day of term, each student meets with his or her Head of House to determine which classes he or she can take. If the student did not pass an O.W.L., he or she discusses options with the Head of House.

If a student achieved the required O.W.L. in a particular subject (which varies from teacher

to teacher), he or she may continue in that subject, but is not required to do so. For example, several (well, all, as far as we know) of Harry's year opted to drop out of Care of Magical Creatures, much to Hagrid's dismay.

June: finals (exams)

Seventh Year:

We won't know what the classes are for seventh year until the book comes out, although it is likely that seventh years concentrate on taking classes in their chosen fields.

June: Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests (N.E.W.T.s)

Ordinary Wizarding Levels (O.W.L.s)

At the end of fifth year, each student sits an Ordinary Wizarding Level (O.W.L.) for each of the classes he or she takes. These are standardized tests administered by the Wizarding Examinations Authority; the teachers may proctor exams outside their own subjects but do not attend the Ordinary Wizarding Level (O.W.L.) in their own subjects.

Each O.W.L. has a theory portion, and for applicable classes a separate practical portion is given, so that many O.W.L.s are in two parts, although only one O.W.L. score is given for each subject. See the individual classes for the details of the material covered in the individual exams.

Pass Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding (O) • Exceeds Expectations (E) • Acceptable (A)
Fail Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor (P) • Dreadful (D) • Troll (T)

Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests (N.E.W.T.s)

At the end of seventh year, each student sits a Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Test (N.E.W.T.) for each of the classes he or she takes. These are standardized tests administered by the Wizarding Examinations Authority, given at the same time and apparently in the same way that O.W.L.s are given to fifth-year students.



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Essays

Snape's Eyes

by *Edmund M. Kern* ^[*]

Presented at Lumos 2006

Las Vegas, Nevada

29 July 2006

How wonderful it is that the second chapter of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* is titled “Spinner’s End.” Wonderful, because, if read ironically, it refers not only to a place, but to Severus Snape’s fate, a rubric revealing that the information provided under it is the key to the whole story. Thus, the eponymous teller of tales will meet his destiny in precisely the way the chapter outlines. It is obvious enough who the “spinner” is, since Snape is either spinning Dumbledore or Voldemort. Obvious, too, is his “end”—his fate—since he agrees to kill the headmaster in making an Unbreakable Vow, a step he in fact takes near the end of the book. (As a momentary aside, to which I shall return later, I must apologize to the eternal optimists among you: Dumbledore is good and dead, and Snape did have a hand in killing him.) Yet the title of the chapter is wonderful for another reason. Readers, having followed Harry for nearly three thousand pages know full well that they can’t possibly trust what this character says about himself. This “spinner’s end” is foreshadowed early on, but we as



readers, on the basis of the precise information the chapter provides, can't possibly know for sure toward *whom* he is spinning, or the reasons behind this particular end. J. K. Rowling has done it again: she sheds new light only to cast new shadows. No character is more doggedly subjected to this treatment than Severus Snape.

But, perhaps, there is a way to judge the actions of Severus Snape? Can we look into his conscience and perceive what lies within? Might we stick to the text of the series, eschewing elaborate suppositions and theories, and give order to textual, formal, literary, and (ultimately) moral evidence in our attempt to fathom the depths of his soul? Perhaps, we should peer into the windows of his soul and discover what Snape's eyes have to tell us?

I want to argue, today, that Snape's eyes are central to unraveling the mysteries of the Harry Potter books. How he uses his eyes and what they do raise interesting and troubling questions about his own behavior, as well as about his role in helping or hindering Harry's struggle with Voldemort. Working from the assumption that Snape has been reading Harry's mind since he arrived at Hogwarts as a student, I will seek to explain the Potions Master's behavior toward Harry. Re-interpreting his actions in this light—seeing things with his eyes—answers, in part, why he is cruel and unfair to Harry. Although Snape's animosity toward Harry is genuine—for reasons only partially explained in the series so far—I believe, some of his behavior masks a hidden concern with Harry's safety and welfare. As Snape explicitly tells Harry during his fifth year at Hogwarts, “Eye contact is often essential to Legilimency” (OP24/469). (All page numbers refer to the U.K. editions of the books.) In what follows, I shall apply this insight to an analysis of the Potions Master himself.

Rowling's texts themselves seem to invite just such an approach. Readers are introduced to Snape for the first time at a Welcome Feast where, following a now-notorious description of him as “a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin,” they learn that “the hook-nosed teacher looked ... straight into Harry's eyes” (PS7/94). Their first encounter Snape's own eyes directly near the beginning of Harry's first Potions class, in the following passage:

His eyes were black like Hagrid's, but they had none of Hagrid's warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels.

(PS7/102)

Hardly a welcoming sight. But this juxtaposition with Hagrid is telling, for Hagrid lives openly and largely unselfconsciously. Hagrid's eyes, too, speak volumes about his character. There is no better contrast to the closed and restrained Potions Master, unless it is Dumbledore. In fact, it also pays dividends to attend to the eyes of still other characters, particularly Dumbledore, whose eyes tend to “twinkle” in moments of great significance, rather than “glitter,” as Snape's do. Yet, for today at least, these

other characters are not my main concern.

If we turn to additional textual evidence, we notice both that Snape uses his eyes for a variety of purposes, and that his eyes also frequently act on their own. Snape, himself, looks, watches, gives a piercing look, catches others' eyes, can't see, shoots a look of pure venom, gives a shrewd and calculating look, stares, wears a look, sets his eyes, gives a look of loathing, avoids others' eyes, glares, eyes others, turns to look, surveys with a look of gloating pleasure, peers, does not look, allows his gaze to linger maliciously, lingers to watch, examines, gazes, or (as he does in his final scene with Harry) closes in and looks down. His eyes, in contrast, make you think, fix, glitter, flash, narrow, wander, flicker, flick, bore into others', gleam, have a mad glint, align, glint, meet Harry's, dart, sweep, fly back, rove, linger, rest on Harry, or meet others'. They sometimes do these things menacingly, dangerously, with malice, malevolently, strangely, unblinkingly, or with loathing in them. They are most often described as black, and the only other adjectives attached to them are cold, empty, fathomless, and dark.

What should we make of this assortment of verbs, adverbs, and adjectives? Whatever his other strengths and virtues, Snape's eyes are not those of a conventionally nice person. His eyes are likewise stereotypically portrayed as villainous. At times his eyes reveal that he delights in evil. But what might a more systematic analysis of Snape's eyes and the uses to which he puts them reveal?

By my count, Snape appears in eighty-one scenes in the six books of the *Harry Potter* series published so far. He is *mentioned* in numerous others, of course, but I find that what others say about this seemingly most untrustworthy of characters is, itself, often—if not usually—untrustworthy. We just don't know if the characters are telling us the truth. The scenes that I have identified and tabulated, therefore, are accounts of events directly witnessed by Harry or, in one instance, the report of a near-omniscient narrator. In them, we as readers witness Snape doing something, saying something, or reacting to something. In many respects, assessing Snape's actions, words, and reactions is no less fraught with uncertainty than assessing what others say about him, because they are almost always related by a focalized narrator providing us with only Harry's thoughts. But on the basis of these eighty-one scenes, we can hold Snape accountable for his own behavior, at least, even if our understanding of it is infected by Harry's own.

In keeping with my current purposes, I'll limit myself to an interest in only two kinds of Snape's behavior, as indicated above: what he does with his eyes or what his eyes themselves do. In fifty-two scenes (or sixty-four percent of the time), we witness one or the other type of behavior. He engages in the various kinds of looking mentioned above in thirty-eight scenes, and his eyes do the things listed in thirty-four. There is some important overlap among these scenes, since in twenty of them, we witness both Snape using his eyes and his eyes doing something. I need hardly add that these twenty scenes include some of the most dramatic and significant of the series. Yet, this count leaves twenty-nine scenes (thirty-six percent of the total) in